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DOI:

[10.1016/j.jeap.2019.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2019.01.001)

*Document Version*

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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Wingate, U. (2019). 'Can you talk me through your argument'? Features of dialogic interaction in academic writing tutorials. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 38, 25-35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2019.01.001>

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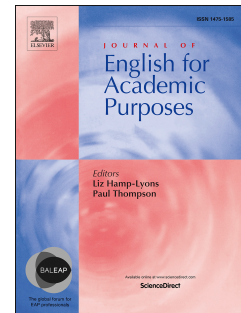
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# Accepted Manuscript

'Can you talk me through your argument'? Features of dialogic interaction in academic writing tutorials

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PII: S1475-1585(18)30501-0

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2019.01.001>

Reference: JEAP 720

To appear in: *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*

Received Date: 10 September 2018

Revised Date: 18 November 2018

Accepted Date: 2 January 2019

Please cite this article as: Wingate, U., 'Can you talk me through your argument'? Features of dialogic interaction in academic writing tutorials, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* (2019), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2019.01.001>.

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**'Can you talk me through your argument'? Features of dialogic interaction in academic writing tutorials**

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## **'Can you talk me through your argument'? Features of dialogic interaction in academic writing tutorials**

### **Background**

One-to-one tutorials, in which students can seek advice on their academic writing, have long existed in various forms. In universities in the USA, writing centres, which offer 'writing conferences' as individual support for students' first-year composition (FYC) classes, were established in the 1960s. These conferences are offered by the FYC instructors who will eventually assess the students' work (Thonus, 2002). In Anglophone universities elsewhere, tutorials are typically provided by learning advisors to students from all levels and disciplines. Some institutions opt for a more discipline-specific approach and employ graduate students to advise novice students from the same field or even study programme. Academic writing tutorials are regarded as beneficial as they provide students with the opportunity to interact with the tutor in the negotiation of ideas (Ewert 2009) and in the joint construction of meaning (Haneda 2004). There is consensus that a collaborative approach is more effective than authoritative and prescriptive teaching behaviour (Ewert 2009; Thonus 1999, 2002). Tutor guidebooks (e.g. Bruce 2009) advocate a non-directive and student-centred approach; tutors should encourage students to find their own answers and solutions, instead of telling them what to do (Williams 2005). This requires a dialogic mode of interaction, in which tutor and student share ideas and jointly develop knowledge (e.g. Nystrand 1997). A dialogic teaching approach fosters students' responsibility for their writing as well as their ability to deal with similar tasks in an independent and self-regulated manner. This is important in the context of one-to-one tutorials, as they are a resource-intensive provision and therefore need to achieve more than the one-off remediation of problems with the current task.

However, several studies into tutorial discourse have found evidence of tutor dominance, which undermines the potential benefits of tutorials (Thonus 1999; 2002; Williams 2005). Dominance is reflected in longer turn length of tutors, less negotiation, a higher frequency of unmitigated directives, and 'a general "take-charge" approach to the tutorial in which tutors direct the course of

the session and make the major decisions' (Thonus 2004: 230). Instead of engaging students in a constructive dialogue about their writing, tutors have been found to conduct monologues in an authoritative and prescriptive manner, giving students little opportunity to express concerns or ideas (Ewert 2009). Too much emphasis is placed on error correction rather than on higher-level or 'global issues of academic writing' such as content and ideas (Weissberg 2006: 252). The tension for tutors is, however, that most students come with the expectation of receiving advice (Clark 2001), while at the same time 'advice giving is interactionally problematic' (Waring 2005: 142). Striking the balance between giving advice and conducting a dialogue requires considerable teaching skills, including the ability to 'scaffold' students' understanding rather than imposing knowledge. The concept of scaffolding refers to the assistance provided by the expert participant in an interaction to help develop the novice participant's skills or knowledge (Wertsch 1998). Reiser (2004: 275) describes scaffolding as 'a delicate negotiation between providing support and continuing to engage learners actively in the process'. If there is too much advice and too little student involvement in the dialogue, 'the assistance will have been local to that instance of scaffolding but will not have provided support for learning'.

The research presented in this article explored the nature of interaction and instructional talk in tutorials delivered by peer tutors. Many universities have chosen the peer-tutoring model for reasons such as facilitating discipline-specific advice or simply for cost saving, as peer tutors are usually employed on an hourly basis and on lower pay than professional instructors. The trade-off of this choice is that peer tutors are perhaps less likely than professional instructors to have the teaching expertise and skills necessary for delivering student-centred, dialogic teaching. Universities therefore need to provide comprehensive tutor training to ensure sufficient quality and success of peer tutoring. To what extent they invest in such training is unknown, and there is also little evidence of the level of interaction and dialogue in peer-led tutorials. Available studies tend to focus on writing conferences with L2 students. Williams (2005), for instance, analysed ten sessions in this context and found clear evidence of tutor dominance. The peer tutors' turn lengths were

significantly longer than those of the tutees, and, despite the 'nondirective philosophy of the center' (p. 51), the tutors gave plenty of direct advice. Park's (2014) research into tutees' resistance to advice and the consequent negotiation with their peer tutors provides an example of a more egalitarian and dialogic climate. The tutors dealt with the resistance skilfully and used it 'as an opportunity to reformulate the initial advice in a way that incorporates the student's specific concerns and ideas' (p. 376). Similarly, Shvidko (2018), who investigated one tutor's mitigation strategies during the potentially face-threatening act of giving critical feedback, found effective use of verbal and non-verbal affiliative strategies that helped to create an atmosphere of collaboration and solidarity.

My research context was a university which had recently introduced academic writing tutorials and adopted the peer-tutoring model. The aim was to examine the extent and strategies of dialogic teaching in peer-led tutorials as the basis for recommendations for tutor training.

### **Dialogic teaching and scaffolding**

In dialogic pedagogy, teacher and students are jointly engaged in the construction of knowledge. Nystrand (1997) identified authentic questions, uptake and high-level evaluation as the main methods of dialogic teaching. Unlike the ubiquitous 'known information' questions (Mehan 1979), which stimulate students' recall of knowledge, authentic questions elicit deep thinking, interpretation and analysis. Uptake means that teachers follow up on students' contributions and expand them, for instance 'by incorporating previous student answers into subsequent questions' (Nystrand 1997: 90). High-level evaluation takes place when teachers ratify the importance of student answers by commenting on them and by 'allowing their [students'] ideas and observations to affect the course of the discussion in substantial ways' (ibid).

These methods of dialogic teaching are largely identical with the strategies described as 'scaffolding' in sociocultural theory. Equivalent to the methods of authentic questions and uptake are the following scaffolding strategies described by Weissberg (2006): (1) questioning to prompt students

to explain, discuss and develop further their ideas, (2) extending students' statements, and (3) 'dialogic links', which are created when tutors take up (for instance by summarising or repetition) a preceding student statement in their response. Dialogic links can also serve the function of high-level evaluation, for instance when student utterances are explicitly acknowledged as relevant.

Additional scaffolding strategies in the metacognitive and affective domains of learning are not covered by the methods of dialogic teaching. These include focusing students' efforts on the more important aspects of the task and helping them to monitor their achievement (Reiser 2004). In the affective domain, tutors have been found to reassure students about the value of their contributions, praise contributions and empathise with students' writing problems (Weissberg 2006).

According to Weissberg (2006: 247), scaffolding is 'one of the principal features that distinguish tutorial talk from teachers' conventional, transmission-style classroom discourse'. It is also, as the previous discussion has shown, an essential feature of dialogic teaching. By eliciting information through questioning and by extending student responses, the tutor creates an exploratory dialogue, which challenges students to think further, engage more deeply with the topic, and solve problems independently. To identify these strategies in tutorial discourse, a structural-functional framework is helpful, as I will explain next.

### **Analysing tutorial dialogue**

As this study aimed at examining features and strategies of dialogic teaching in peer tutorials, I chose as an initial tool for the discourse analysis the structural-functional model by Wells (1996). Although this model was developed for the analysis of classroom discourse, it is highly suitable for other types of educational interaction and has been previously used for the analysis of one-to-one tutorials by Haneda (2004). Structural-functional models are concerned with the description of the units that form spoken discourse and the functions carried out in them. An early model of classroom discourse showed that the predominant exchange pattern consists of the three moves Initiation-

Response-Feedback (IRF), a pattern that has been widely recognised as typical for pedagogic discourse (e.g. Mehan 1979, Wells 1996). Wells (1996) developed this model further by examining how the way in which teachers use moves can achieve the expansion of exchanges into sequences, i.e. a series of exchanges related to the same topic. As dialogic interaction unfolds through this expansion, Wells' rank-scale model of discourse units, which describes the functions of the moves that extend exchanges into sequences (see details below and an illustration in Appendix 1), was useful for the examination of dialogic teaching strategies in the tutorials under focus.

The discourse pattern of IRF has originally been described as characteristic of teacher dominance, because the majority of IRF exchanges are initiated and closed by the teacher. When the initiation move presents a 'known information' question, and the third move is the teacher's evaluation (through expressions such as 'that's right') of the pre-specified answer, a format that Mehan (1979) called Initiate-Response-Evaluate (IRE)<sup>i</sup>, the evaluation completes the exchange and stifles interaction and dialogue. This type of evaluation can be regarded as 'low-level', in contrast to the high-level evaluation that Nystrand (1997) described as a method of dialogic teaching. Wells (1996), however, showed that this third move, which he renamed 'Follow-up', does not need to be an evaluation, but, depending on the function chosen by the teacher, can extend the exchange towards a dialogue. Similarly, in the initiation move, the teacher's choice of question determines the scope of the contribution the respondent can make. If, instead of a known information question, the teacher asks a 'negotiatory information question', the answer will be 'reached through open-ended discussion between teacher and students together' (Nassaji & Wells 2000: 385). The teacher has the choice between taking the role of 'primary knower' (K1), thus restricting students to delivering an expected response, or that of 'secondary knower' (K2), assigning the role of primary knower to the student and thus inviting him/her to present their knowledge and ideas. Responses of K1 students are not only more substantive, but also likely to trigger a teacher follow-up that is more substantive than a pure evaluation and often includes a high-level evaluation. Such a follow-up typically leads to further exchanges, which Wells calls 'bound exchanges' (e.g. embedded or dependent exchanges),



as they are topically bound to the initial 'nuclear' exchange. The nuclear and subsequent bound exchanges, the number of which varies according to what is needed to complete the topic initiated by the nuclear exchange, form the next-largest discourse unit, the sequence. The largest unit is the episode, consisting of the total number of sequences.

Several studies explored how teachers' move choices enabled dialogic interaction. Nassaji and Wells (2000) analysed 44 episodes of classroom interaction and found that the choice of initiating questions strongly influenced the development of a sequence and that negotiatory information questions led to significantly longer and more complex student contributions, which were significantly less likely to be followed up by sequence-completing, low-level evaluations. Most important for the development of a sequence was the follow-up move, if 'the teacher avoids evaluation and instead requests justifications, connections or counter-arguments' (p. 401). Haneda (2004) investigated the development of dialogue in tutorials provided by herself to learners of Japanese. In this context, both language proficiency as well as the nature of topic influenced student participation in the dialogue. When the topic was the content of writing, the primary knower role was more often assigned to the student than when the focus was on language. In content-focused exchanges the tutor frequently used high-level evaluations that included the uptake and appreciation of the student's response. By contrast, in language-focused sequences that aimed at improving the accuracy of texts, there was a considerable amount of monologic instruction, in which the tutor tended to initiate in the K1 role and follow up by low-level evaluations. Although the tutor's goal was to help students to become active and self-regulated learners through high levels of engagement and decision making in the dialogue, this goal could not be pursued when students' language proficiency and quality of draft were low.

The structural-functional framework, if used as the only analytical tool, is not sufficient to identify and describe dialogic teaching. As Wells (1996: 78) warned, 'actual examples of discourse are often much less tidy', as they often do not follow the strict IRF format. In addition, a more recent study (Boyd & Markarian 2015) in an elementary classroom has showed that dialogic teaching cannot be

defined only by surface dialogic features such as question or follow-up type. The researchers found that 'dialogic teaching can involve surface monologic interactional structures and an overtly directive style of teaching' (p. 287), when the overall classroom culture and teacher-student relationship fostered dialogic interaction. To gain a holistic understanding of what dialogic teaching can be, researchers need to look beyond an 'isolated snapshot of the classroom' (p. 278). For these reasons, in the present study the structural-functional framework was complemented with an analysis of scaffolding strategies and dialogic moves. To avoid looking at snapshots only, the in-depth qualitative analysis included two tutorials per tutor.

### **Research aim and questions**

My research into the teaching approaches of a group of peer tutors was motivated by the university's decision to facilitate discipline-specific advice by appointing PhD students to advise novice students from the same field or discipline. As previously mentioned, the choice of disciplinary knowledge over the potentially higher teaching expertise of professional instructors brings with it the need to ensure the effectiveness and quality of tutor-student interaction.

Two research questions were asked:

1. To what extent did the peer tutors follow a dialogic teaching approach?
2. What were the main characteristics of dialogic and monologic teaching approaches observed in the tutorials?

The identification of prevalent teaching approaches and the description of characteristics of dialogic versus monologic teaching will add to the insights from previous studies (Nassaji & Wells 2002; Haneda 2004) and will provide guidance for universities that want to evaluate their tutoring service, for trainers of tutors, and for tutors themselves.

### **Methodology**

#### *Background information*

Two versions of one-to-one tutorials are offered at the university: students can book appointments with a PhD student of their choice or go to the 'drop-in' service that is provided for several hours per week. Information on the tutors' backgrounds is available on a website, so that students can find an advisor from their field of study. All peer tutors are required to attend a one-day training session on tutoring. This training addresses (1) the focus of instruction, for instance critical engagement, structure, grammar, referencing; and (2) instructional strategies, for instance active listening, questioning for answers rather than providing them and asking open questions. Whilst the training informs on some general principles of 'good' teaching strategies, which are in accordance with the tutoring guidelines that were discussed earlier, it lacks concrete examples of features of dialogic and monologic teaching, and of teaching strategies associated to these approaches.

#### *Participants and data collection*

At the training day, the 20 peer tutors employed for the academic year were informed about the research project, and twelve volunteered to participate. Of these, five were not included, as they came from the fields of Natural and Life Sciences and offered mainly advice on statistics. Of the remaining seven, who advise on academic writing, two tutors had to be eliminated from the data analysis, as the sessions that were recorded with them were concerned with general advice rather than a specific piece of writing. Three of the remaining five tutors, Emma<sup>ii</sup>, Hannah and Lucy, came from the Social Sciences and two, Daisy and Steve, from Humanities.

To recruit the student participants, I wrote to 25 students who had booked appointments with the participating tutors. Eight students agreed to me observing and recording their tutorial. Three of these sessions were not analysed because their focus was not on writing. One of the remaining five students was observed twice. To enlarge the data pool, drop-in sessions were included, and for these, the tutors were asked to invite students to participate in the study. As participation was unpredictable, I was not present to observe these sessions. Six students consented, and the tutors

recorded the sessions. Of these, three had to be eliminated as, again, they were concerned with general enquiries. One student was recorded in two sessions with different tutors.

A total of ten tutorials, consisting of six booked appointments and four drop-in sessions, involving five tutors and eight students (see Table 1), were fully transcribed and analysed. Their length ranged from 24.41 to 60.05 minutes, with an average length of 47 minutes. All ten tutorials were subjected to quantitative analysis. This led to the identification of the two most dialogic and the two most monologic tutorials, which were then analysed qualitatively. For five tutorials, I could obtain the draft that was discussed in the tutorial, and in two cases, I received the final text and was also able to interview the student within a month after the tutorial. For reasons explained below, these two tutorials were selected for an in-depth qualitative analysis, and the additional data was considered and provided useful background information.

#### *Data analysis*

The audio-recordings of the ten sessions were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were first segmented into sequences according to Wells' (1996) rank-scale units of discourse. In addition, the number of turns<sup>iii</sup> in each tutorial was identified. A tutorial profile was then developed for each session, in which the sequences' topic was described and the initiator of the sequence was identified (TI = teacher-initiated; SI = student-initiated). The profiles aided the initial assessment of the dialogic nature of the tutorials and helped to monitor how tutors steered the interaction towards task accomplishment.

#### *Quantitative analysis*

To establish the extent of dialogic teaching across the tutorials (research question 1), several quantitative measures were employed. First, the percentage of tutor word count (TWC%, see Table 1) was calculated, as a high ratio of tutor versus student word count indicates tutor dominance and limited student involvement in the dialogue (Thonus 2002). A contrasting measure was the mean of the length of student responses (M ST Res), as a high mean student response length has been shown

to be an effective measure of complex and substantive student responses (Nassaji & Wells 2000).

The last measure was the comparison of the number of turns per each minute of the tutorials

(Turns/min), because a high number of turns indicates a high level of interaction and dialogue.

Statistical analysis was used to establish whether the combination of these measure was effective in indicating the level of dialogic teaching. Tutor word count was used as the main indicator of dialogic/monologic teaching, and the word count values were correlated with (1) mean student response lengths, and (2) the number of turns per minute.

The correlation results confirmed that the measures are indicative of dialogic/monologic teaching.

Across the tutorials, there was a highly significant negative correlation between tutor word count and mean student response rate ( $p = -.823$ ; Sig= .003), showing that the more the tutor talks, the more restricted are the student answers. That extended tutor talk also reduces interaction was shown by the highly significant negative correlation that was established between tutor word count and number of turns ( $p = -.958$ ; Sig= .000). The tutorials, listed in Table 1, were ranked from the most dialogic to the most monologic tutorial according to the leading measure, tutor word count. Table 1 gives the names of tutors and students in the first column and provides information on the type of tutorial (Tut Type), which distinguishes drop-in sessions (D) from booked appointments (B), and the purposes of the tutorials, i.e. assignment planning (AP) versus requested comments on students' drafts (CD), as the different purposes might influence the teaching approach. The length of the tutorials and the number of sequences (Seq) they consist of are listed in columns 3 and 4. As a further possible indicator of students' equal participation in the dialogue, the number of student-initiated sequences and their percentage is listed in column 5.

*Place Table 1 here.*

To answer research question 2, the two most dialogic (1 and 2, delivered by Daisy) and the two most monologic tutorials (9 and 10, delivered by Emma) were selected for qualitative analysis.

*Qualitative analysis*

The qualitative analysis was concerned with identifying the main characteristics of dialogic and monologic teaching. As discussed earlier, dialogues in teaching contexts typically unfold through the way in which the teacher initiates and follows up in exchanges with the students, and to examine these moves, Wells' (1996) rank-scale units model was used for the initial analysis. The sequences of the four selected tutorials were further segmented into their constituent exchanges. The exchanges were coded according to the three<sup>iv</sup> types of (1) nuclear, i.e. independent exchanges that introduce a new aspect to the discourse, (2) dependent, i.e. exchanges which develop the nuclear exchange further through explanation, exemplification or justification, and (3) embedded, i.e. exchanges which serve to clarify a communication problem through, for instance, the request for repetition. Each move was then coded for their type (initiate, response, follow-up). To examine the students' opportunity to provide substantive answers as a result of being assigned the role of primary knower, the initiate and response moves were also coded for knower status (K1 and K2). Next, the teacher moves were coded for their function<sup>v</sup>, for instance 'Prompt' (Prompting student to give information) for the initiating move, and 'Acc' (Accepting student response), 'Sum' (Summarising student response) and 'Ev' (Evaluating student response) for the follow-up move. Frequently, the follow-up move had a second part that was the initiation of the next dependent move. An example of the unit analysis can be found in Table 5.

However, the structural-functional analysis is not capable of fully capturing scaffolding strategies, particularly those in the metacognitive and affective domains. Therefore, after the structural analysis, the sequences were coded for scaffolding strategies. As explained earlier, some strategies of dialogic teaching and scaffolding are identical. Consequently, move functions such as Prompt indicate the scaffolding strategies of questioning (Ques) and extending student statements (Ext), while dialogic links can coincide with the functions Summary and Evaluation. Codes in the metacognitive domain included goal setting (Goal: focusing the student on task requirements), and monitoring of student achievement (Mon). In the affective domain, codes were assigned for hedging (Hedge: reducing tutor authority/putting student at ease), reassurance when students were unsure

about their contributions (ReAss) and praise for contributions. However, some scaffolding strategies, for instance the metacognitive one of focusing students' effort on important task aspects were not confined to a sequence. To identify scaffolding that stretched over several sequences, the scaffolding instances in each sequence were labelled with their topical focus, and the labels of all sequences of the tutorial were compared.

In the unit analysis of the four selected tutorials, however, it became apparent that, as Wells (1996) observed, that real educational discourse does not neatly follow the IRF format. Unlike classroom interaction, in one-to-one tutorials students tend to have more opportunity to initiate exchanges or to disrupt the teacher-initiated sequence by diverting from the topic. There were several sequences in which topic-unrelated comments by the student interrupted the expansion of the initiated topic. Other sequences were initiated by student questions and triggered instructional talk by the tutor. In only nine of the 39 sequences identified in the four tutorials did the dialogue unfold in the strict IRF order described in the rank-scale units model. To be able to identify dialogic teaching beyond these nine sequences, I developed an additional coding system of dialogic moves, which combines both dialogic teaching and scaffolding strategies and identifies the following tutor moves (1) Initiating moves, (2) Developmental moves, (3) Sustaining moves, and (4) Reassuring moves.

Initiating moves, for example 'Can you talk me through your argument?' (Daisy-Tessa S8/T107) are the same as in the rank-scale units model. Although they initiate a nuclear exchange, because of disruptions they not always lead to an extended dialogue. Developmental moves, which are identical to dependent exchanges or Nystrand's (1997) method of uptake, consist of questions that develop the topic further by focusing the student on a new or critical aspect, for example: 'Do you have a sense of how people were talking about it?' (Daisy-Hanad, S10/T110, where the tutor gets the student to think about the reception of the novel under discussion). Sustaining moves are affective scaffolding strategies; they serve to sustain the student's contribution by encouraging him/her to continue. These moves often consist of backchannels, or contain dialogic links, for instance: 'So you already have the *literature*'? (Daisy-Tessa S5/T67), where 'literature' links to the literature review

that the student had mentioned in the previous exchange. Reassuring moves are also affective scaffolding strategies as they give positive feedback on a contribution and often appear after an expression of uncertainty by the student, for example 'Indeed, that is again an excellent point, absolutely' (Daisy-Hanad S11/T114). Regular occurrence of the move types 1 – 4 was seen as an indication of dialogic teaching and scaffolding, and the frequency of these moves was compared across the four tutorials. As a further indicator of affective scaffolding strategies, the frequency of dialogic links and positive evaluations was counted in addition.

### **Discussion of findings**

As a general observation, the provision of discipline-specific advice by peers seemed to be successful. In eight of the ten tutorials, the students were advised by a tutor from either the same department or the same faculty, and in two cases, the students had found out from the website that the tutor had a first degree in their subject. In Tutorials 1 – 8, the tutors were successful in helping the students to develop their ideas, gain a better understanding of the topic or task, or learn new principles of academic writing. Feedback on the tutorial service's website was provided by the students of Tutorials 3, 4, 5, and 6, and they had all chosen the category 'Very useful'.

Research question 1 was concerned with the extent to which the peer tutors followed a dialogic teaching approach. The mean percentage of teacher word count is 74%, which is in line with other studies that measured participant time at talk (Thonus 1999; Williams 2005) and particularly Thonus' (2002: 121) finding that in 11 out of the 12 tutorials she examined, 'tutors spoke half again as much as their tutees (a ratio of 1.5)'. The fact that eight of the ten tutorials had a tutor word count between 69.6% and 95, and accordingly shorter student responses and a lower number of turns, suggests a tendency to tutor dominance, monologic teaching and insufficient interaction. However, in four of these eight tutorials (3,5,6,7), between 27% and 44% of the sequences were student-initiated. The student initiations were in all cases questions that required instruction and therefore



triggered often lengthy responses. The initiation of sequences, on the other hand, is a sign of active student participation in the tutorial, which shows that the tutorials had a dialogic tendency.

It should be noted that in three of the four lowest ranking, i.e. most monologic, tutorials, the students requested comments on a draft (CD). This type of tutorial obviously influences the nature of the dialogue, as the students themselves would expect to be recipients of the tutor's feedback instead of active developers of ideas. The only exception was Tutorial 4, in which Denise, a student of Geography, asked Hannah, a PhD student in War Studies, to comment on a 2000-word essay on paleoclimatic change North Africa. Hannah, who had not seen the essay before the tutorial refrained from close reading and commented only on some structural issues; instead, she encouraged Denise to explain her argument. Unlike the other three tutorials of this type, this approach led to a content-focused dialogue, that helped Denise to understand that she needed to take a more critical stance.

Before I discuss the findings from the four tutorials selected for qualitative analysis, I provide a brief description of them.

#### *Description of the four tutorials*

Tutorials 1 and 2 were delivered by Daisy, a PhD student in English Literature. In Tutorial 1, she advised Tessa, an MA student in War Studies, on the planning of her dissertation on policies related to extremist groups. A main discussion point in the tutorial was whether different chapters should be devoted to the different groups of extremists; however, Tessa found it problematic to distinguish these groups. Through questioning and other scaffolding strategies, Daisy helped Tessa to develop a new categorisation. Tessa stated twice during the tutorial how useful she perceived it to be.

In Tutorial 2, Daisy was consulted by Hanad, an undergraduate student who sought advice on the planning of an essay in English Literature with the title: *'Uncle Tom's Cabin is a very bad novel, of self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality (James Baldwin). Discuss'*. Hanad had read extensively about the author and the novel, but had not considered how to respond to the essay title. In the tutorial, she spoke recurrently about the historical, religious and political context of the novel. Daisy

acknowledged each of Hanad's contributions, but tried repeatedly to steer her to focus on the title. Hanad was interviewed a month after the tutorial; she was very satisfied with the advice she had received and mentioned several points that she had followed when she wrote the essay. The final text showed Hanad's uptake of some crucial points of advice related to addressing the essay title.

In Tutorial 9, Emma, a PhD student in Education Policy, was seen by Sam, a first-year undergraduate student of Geography. Sam had to write a reflective 3000-word assignment, which required him to compare his perceptions of certain aspects of geography at the beginning and end of his first semester. After having written about 1000 words, he had run out of ideas. At no point did Emma ask any questions relating to what Sam had already written or what his perceptions were. After a quick reading of the guidelines for the assignment, she began a series of long monologues, occasionally interrupted by Sam's requests for clarification, in which she explained how the assignment should be written. There is no data providing information on Sam's satisfaction with the tutorial.

Tutorial 10 was different from the previous three, as the student brought a complete draft for comments. Mika, an MA student of Child Studies, had seen Emma once before for advice on another draft. To this second tutorial, she did not come with specific questions, but simply presented her 2000-word draft to Emma for comments. Emma, who had not seen the text before, got immediately caught up by linguistic errors that prevented her from understanding some of the text's meaning. As a result, Emma focused entirely on linguistic and structural deficiencies in the text, issuing a series of critical comments. For example, she spent the first third (17.17 of 54.38 minutes) of the tutorial on the first paragraph of 127 words, in which she pointed out 10 shortcomings (see Table 2). She then stated that she could not give such detailed feedback on more paragraphs as this was not a proof reading service; however, she continued in exactly the same way with the following two paragraphs. Mika's contribution to the tutorial was restricted to a few short explanations and justifications as obvious from her mean response length of 10.6 words. In minute 50, Mika uttered 'Sorry, I know it's terrible' and began to cry. In an interview four weeks after the tutorial, Mika stated that she was

never going to use the tutorial service again, as she had been devastated by Emma's feedback. After that experience, she consulted her programme director who arranged support from a fellow student. As a result, the final text had undergone substantial changes at the level of stance and argument.

#### *Characteristics of the dialogic and monologic tutorials*

The analysis of the four dialogic move categories is discussed first, because, as mentioned earlier, the exact IRF structure was maintained in only 9 sequences, which were all part of Tutorials 1 and 2. No IRF exchanges and no scaffolding strategies could be identified in any sequence of Tutorials 9 and 10. In Tutorial 9, Emma asked Sam only four questions; however, these were not of the initiating type, as their function was to gain some background information on the assignment. In Tutorial 10, Emma asked two rhetorical questions ('Do you know what to do in an Introduction/Conclusion?'), which she subsequently answered herself. The absence of initiation moves meant that the students were never assigned primary knower position and never enabled to present or develop their ideas. There was no dialogic interaction; by contrast, the tutorials consisted of one-directional talk, in which the tutor prescribed what and how to write without ascertaining whether the student found her proposals relevant or even understood them. As a result of this teaching approach, there were considerably fewer sequences and turns in these two tutorials. For instance, Sequence 2 in Tutorial 9 lasted 11.2 minutes and consisted of only five turns. Sam's two turns were questions of five and eight words respectively, which shows that the sequence was dominated by three lengthy monologues by Emma. Such monologues had a destructive effect, when they consisted of an accumulation of negative evaluations, as in Tutorial 10. The linguistic inaccuracies criticised in one sequence are listed in Table 2, where extracts of the evaluative language used by Emma are presented in italics.

*Place Table 2 here.*

Emma's comments were either intimidating ('your grade goes down'), stereotyping (see No 4), or they express unmitigated disapproval ('this is completely wrong'). They projected the student as a failure, as her writing would not even make sense to a writing tutor. Because of the monologic delivery, the student had no opportunity to reconsider some of her linguistic choices and to learn through this process. The comments offered no constructive advice; instead they suggested that the magnitude of the student's language problems made their solution impossible. The whole tutorial focused on error correction without any attention to or 'global issues of academic writing' (Weissberg 2006: 252).

To illustrate the difference between Daisy's dialogic and Emma's monologic tutoring styles, a comparison of the dialogic moves in the four tutorials is shown in Table 3, where the frequency of these moves and their percentage of the total of the tutor's turns is presented. The frequencies of use of dialogic links and praise are also listed.

*Place Table 3 here.*

While there was a total absence of dialogic moves in Emma's tutorials, in Daisy's they accounted for over 50% of all tutor turns. An interesting difference, which reflects the nature of the two dialogic tutorials, lies in the use of sustaining moves, which amount to 22.4% of tutor turns in Tutorial 1, and only to 1.6% in Tutorial 2. In Tutorial 1, the sustaining moves supported Tessa's development of arguments and exploration of ideas, which generally extended over many exchanges. The sustaining moves often consisted of dialogic links, for instance the echoing of Tessa's previous statement, which signalled Daisy's listenership and interest. In Tutorial 2 by contrast, Daisy had little motive to sustain Hanad's contributions, as these often brought in an unrelated topic which interrupted the expansion of the original dialogue.

However, despite the difficulty to maintain a topic-focused dialogue, Daisy succeeded in making Hanad aware of the need to unpick Baldwin's quotation. This understanding was scaffolded across

several sequences. In Sequence 3, she steered the student, who was elaborating on the novel's historical context, toward the essay title by saying

'So the history is really important but don't forget, whenever you are given a quotation to look at, really try to take that quotation apart and see what that quotation is really saying, so 'a very bad novel', alright, and then it's saying 'self-righteous' and 'virtuous sentimentality', so make sure that when you write the essay it responds to these statements that Baldwin is making.' (S3/T19)

Hanad did not respond to this suggestion but changed the topic to literacy devices. In Sequence 5, Daisy tried again to focus Hanad's attention on Baldwin's quotation. Finally, in Sequence 7, after Hanad spoke about the role of religion in the novel, Daisy directed her back to the quotation by initiating with the following question:

'So when you are talking about religion how did that become...why does it become so sort of sentimental or bad or whatever here in the novel?' (S 7/T52)

Hanad responded with an unrelated comment on Christianity in American society; however, Daisy completed the sequence with a series of developmental moves, shown in bold print in Table 4, that helped Hanad to understand why Baldwin called the novel sentimental.

*Place Table 4 here.*

Out of context, these developmental moves could be regarded as prescriptive, as four consist of closed questions which impose the understanding of Baldwin's judgment on Hanad. However, the preceding failed attempts to draw Hanad's attention to the quotation as well as her inconclusive responses in Sequence 7 obviously made Daisy realise that clear guidance was needed if Hanad were to address the assignment task appropriately. However, she maintains a dialogic style by beginning the exchange with an open question (T58) and continuing by using questions rather than explanations. This approach may have given the student the feeling that understanding was jointly achieved. As discussed by Boyd & Markarian (2015), dialogic teaching can involve closed questions and overt directives, if, as in Daisy's case, the overall instructional stance is dialogic.

The final example presents a sequence with a pure IRF structure, in which the tutor's skilful use of initiations and follow-ups guides the student toward a new conceptualisation of categories with which she had so far struggled. The detailed unit analysis as well as the analysis of scaffolding strategies is shown Table 5.

*Place Table 5 here.*

Daisy initiates the exchanges with an authentic and negotiatory information question, assigning the role of primary knower to Tessa. The question is refined in T 77, and hedged with another question, after Tessa has signalled uncertainty. Tessa's response (T 78) shows that Daisy had precisely identified Tessa's problem with the topic. In Turn 80, Tessa reacts to Daisy's prompting by reflecting on her previous categorisation and considering a different one. Daisy extends the dialogue in a new initiating move (T81), in which she requests information on the policy aspect. At the same time, this initiation contains a high-level evaluation of the previous student contribution through a dialogic link (policy (-ies)/applicable/application). However, Tessa's response to this prompt expresses further uncertainty, which leads Daisy to a long follow-up (T83) that serves several functions. First, she summarises the distinctions Tessa has recognised so far (1), and then provides metacognitive scaffolding by implicitly stating a goal, which is that the significance of the distinctions has yet to be established (2). Next, she offers affective scaffolding by reassuring Tessa (3) and praising her progress so far (4). She then creates a dialogic link to an earlier student contribution regarding the dissertation structure, which is another example of her engaged listenership. With these strategies, Daisy summarises progress and brings the dialogue to a point from where Tessa can further develop it. Daisy's follow-up in T83 does indeed trigger the initiation of a subsequent dependent exchange by Tessa, in which she compares policy distinctions with her new categories. The sequence continues for another 14 turns and three dependent exchanges, of which one more is initiated by Tessa, and culminates in her new conceptualisation of categories.

Sequence 6 is representative of the teaching approach observed in Daisy's two tutorials, which is characterised by equal tutor-student participation, a prevalence of dialogic tutor moves, and an entirely content-focused discussion. The main features of dialogic and monologic tutoring are summarised in the final section.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the ten tutorials revealed a high ratio of tutor talk in eight; this seemed to be mostly caused by the tutor's intention to cater for the student with ready answers and solutions, when, according to the principles of dialogic teaching, they should have prompted the student to develop these solutions. This approach was extreme in Tutorial 9, in which the tutor prescribed how the essay should be written without even asking the student what his problems or ideas were. Tutorials 9 and 10, identified as the most monologic ones in the data, showed a complete absence of the features that characterised the most dialogic ones. These include the tutoring strategies of (1) initiating exchanges that position the student as the more knowledgeable conversation partner, so that s/he can confidently express and develop thoughts; (2) following up student contributions by taking up important points for expansion; (3) providing high-level evaluations of the student contributions by acknowledging their importance, and (4) enhancing the student's confidence by reassuring moves and praise. There was no instance of negative evaluation in the dialogic tutorials; on the contrary, even student comments that disrupted the development of dialogue were followed up with high-level evaluations.

By contrast, Tutorial 10 consisted mainly of negative evaluations, with a demoralising effect on the student. A partial explanation for this teaching behaviour may be the type of advice sought by the student, feedback on a draft, which naturally evokes more tutor input and critique than tutorials where advice is requested for assignment planning. However, as perhaps the majority of academic writing tutorials, and particularly writing conferences, require the tutor to provide feedback on drafts, the example of Tutorial 10 shows that specific attention must be paid by managers of tutorial

services, tutor trainers and tutors to the inherent problems of this type of tutorial. Explicit guidelines must prevent students from presenting lengthy drafts without any specific questions to the tutor. Clear signposting must guide students to the service they really need, be it proof reading, English language support or academic writing advice. Tutors must be encouraged to redirect students to the appropriate service and discouraged from trying to comment on long drafts that they had no chance to read before the tutorial. Most importantly, training must ensure that tutors formulate critical comments in a constructive manner.

A general conclusion from this study is that prescriptive and monologic tutorials such as 9 and 10 should not be possible in any context. If they do occur, as this and other studies have shown, this suggests that universities do not invest sufficiently into the training of tutors and the monitoring of their performance. There may be various reasons for this lack of investment, such as the attempt to provide student support on the cheap, or the taking for granted of peer tutors' teaching ability, or an unawareness of what appropriate training for peer tutors should entail. As evident from the findings of this and previous research, the features and strategies of dialogic teaching should be at forefront of tutor training. Since tutors obviously tend to talk much more than their tutees, the advantages of dialogic teaching for student learning must be made more explicit. Simple reference to the relevant learning theories may not be sufficient; this should be complemented by the analysis of authentic examples of tutorial interaction. If tutors were asked to carry out structural-functional and scaffolding analyses of extracts from their own or their fellow peers' tutorials, they would be likely to develop a deep understanding of how a dialogue can be initiated, sustained and expanded, and of how students can be best supported cognitively and affectively.

This study has mainly relied on one data source, the observation of tutorials, with limited additional evidence from student interviews and texts. There is a need for more comprehensive research that includes interviews with tutors, pre- and post-tutorial interviews with students, text analysis as well as student progress and performance data. Information from this combination of sources would help



to ensure that the resource-intensive provision of one-to-one tutorials can be designed and delivered in ways that maximise student support and learning.

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## Appendix 1.

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<sup>i</sup> An example of the IRE format would be: *T: In which state is San Francisco? S: California. T: Correct.*

<sup>ii</sup> For confidentiality, the names of tutors and students are pseudonyms.

<sup>iii</sup> A turn, which often contains more than one move, is understood here as defined by Sachs et al (1974), i.e. sentences, clauses or phrases, the end of which signals that other interactants can take their turn. This means that short phrases such as 'good' were counted as turn when they had the move function of response, but backchannels of this type, which often overlapped with the interactant's talk, were not counted.

<sup>iv</sup> The forth move described by Wells (1996), 'preparatory', is typical for classroom discourse and did not occur in the data of this study.

<sup>v</sup> The codes used for function in previous research (for instance by Nassaji & Wells for classroom discourse) were found to be too detailed and largely irrelevant. The codes for this study were created after an initial analysis of the tutor moves in all ten tutorials.

# 'Can you talk me through your argument'? Features of dialogic interaction in academic writing tutorials

## Tables and Appendix

**Table 1: Quantitative analysis of dialogic versus monologic tutoring**

Tutorials (Tutor/student)	Tut Type	Length	Seq	SI Seq	TWC%	M St Res	Turns	Turns/ min
1. Daisy-Tessa	D/ AP	47.03	15	4 (27%)	51.3	34.6	251	5.3
2. Daisy-Hanad	D/ AP	24.41	12	6 (50%)	54.3	44	126	5.2
3. Lucy-Edith	B/ AP	46.54	16	7 (44%)	69.6	38.2	188	4
4. Hannah-Denise	B/ CD	46.36	15	2 (13%)	70.3	31.5	153	3.3
5. Lucy-Mei Li	B/ AP	45.34	15	4 (27%)	73.2	40.1	162	3.8
6. Hannah-Hanad	D/ AP	58.53	16	6 (38%)	74.2	18.1	148	2.5
7. Emma-Mika 1	B/ CD	48.22	11	4 (36%)	79.2	21.9	109	2.3
8. Steve-Yasuf	B/ CD	46.17	13	2 (15%)	80.6	15.3	141	3.1
9. Emma-Sam	D/ AP	60.05	5	1 (20%)	93.2	14	85	1.4
10. Emma-Mika 2	B/ CD	54.38	7	0 (0%)	95	10.6	74	1.4

**Table 2: Negative evaluations, Sequence 2, Tutorial 10**

**S2: 1.08– 18.25 mins. Focus on first paragraph (127 words):**

Initial move: E: *'So there are some language problems here'.*

1. Incorrect punctuation around referencing: *'gives bad impression...your grade goes down'*
2. Incorrect word choice: *'and this I don't understand either'*
3. Unclear expression: *'So from the very first sentence your meaning doesn't come across clearly because of lexical choices'*
4. Missing connectives: *'This is a typical problem of Chinese students'*
5. Sentence structure: *'This sentence also doesn't exactly make sense'*
6. Unclear expression: *'This has to be explained obviously'*
7. Incorrect preposition: *'I 'm trying to see what you mean, but it's not clear here'*
8. Incorrect use of capital letter: *'I mean this obviously is a mistake'*
9. Absence of qualifying adjective: *'Make it a bit more specific...this is a little bit elliptical'*
10. Incorrect word choice: *'Some other words might be kind of within the range of meaning that you want to express, whereas this is completely wrong'*

**Table 3: Frequency of dialogic moves**

Move type	1 Daisy-Tessa (125)*	2 Daisy-Hanad (63)	9 Emma-Sam (43)	10 Emma-Mika (40)
Initiation	9 (7.2%)	7 (11%)	0	0
Developmental	16 (12.8%)	12 (19%)	0	0
Sustaining	28 (22.4%)	1 (1.6%)	0	0
Reassuring	19 (15.2%)	12 (19%)	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>72 (57.6)</b>	<b>32 (50.8)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Dialogic links	21 (16.6%)	4 (6%)	0	0
Praise	15 (12%)	11 (17%)	0	1

\*Number of tutor turns

**Table 4: Developmental moves in Sequence 7, Tutorial 2 (turns 56- 70)**

56. **D: So in the novel, would you say it's a sentimental novel?**  
 57. H: Yeah  
 58. **D: You would and so why would you say it's sentimental?**  
 59. H: I would say it (0.6)  
 60. **D: Is it how she is representing black people is it?**  
 61. H: Yeah there is a lot of, it has a lot of sentimental and emotional value to it, there is a lot of scenes that are like dis- like that makes you distraught kind of thing.  
 62. D: But this don't seem sort of, are they quite sort of  
 63. H: They are very emotive they are  
 64. D: Emotive  
 65. H: And they are (0.2)  
 66. **D: Are they quite sort of caricaturish? Are they so what are**  
 67. H: They are  
 68. **D: Or are they quite sort of simplistic? Like is she reducing people?**  
 69. H: Yeah yeah, that's it.  
 70. D: Ok make sure you mention that, that's really important, because fundamentally the novel is about how is she depicting slavery and how is she depicting black people.

**Table 5: Unit analysis of Part 1, Sequence 6, Tutorial 1**

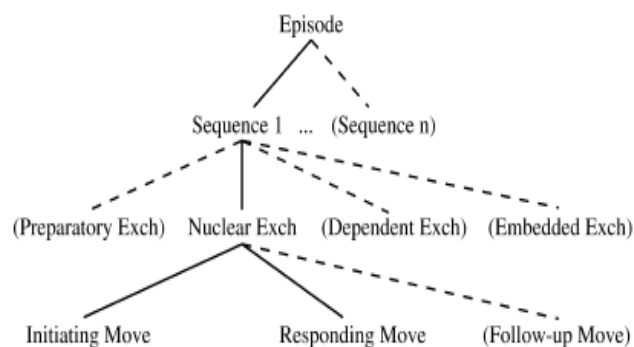
<b>Topic: Discussion of categories of foreign fighters in relation to government policies</b>	<b>Exch type</b>	<b>Move type</b>	<b>Knower status</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Scaffolding 'Policy distinction'</b>
75. D: I mean do policies themselves distinguish between these different sorts of foreign fighters?	Nuc	Init	K2	Prompt	Ques
76. T: um?	Emb	Res			
77. D: (1) or do they kind of lump them into similar groups, so is that what you are trying to sort of tease apart? (0.2) Is that a hard question? ((laughter))	Nuc	Init	K2	Prompt	
78. T: Right, no it's a very good question because that is basically where I am at ((laughter))	Dep	Res			
79. D: oh ok	Dep	F-up		Acc	(1) Ques (2) Hedge
80. T: so the thing is in my proposal I divided it into these three groups and I kind of feel like I have to stick to it, but I might include the last two groups into one and say generally radicalisation and then terrorism and then within the group of terrorism I will distinguish more, because there is some policies that are applicable to both groups.	Dep	Res	K1		
81. D: Ok. So is there is a difference growing in policy applications as well, is it?	Dep	F-up Init	K2	Acc Prompt	
82. T: um I don't know yet.	Dep	Res			
83. D: you don't know ok ok. (1) So you were going to explore the fact that policies, some policies include both groups and others don't, right? (2) And what the significance of that is, you might not know that yet, (3) that's fine. (4) But to me it sounds quite like what you said before sounded quite sensible (5) so when you are saying you want to	Dep	F-up		Acc Sum Ev	(1) Dial. link (2) Goal (3) ReAss (4) Praise

look in one section or a chapter or whatever it is, at those that are radicalised and those that are active terrorists.

(5) Dial.  
link

Exch type = exchange type: Nuc: nuclear; Dep: dependent; Emb: embedded. Move type: Init: initiate; Res: response; F-up: follow-up. Function: Prompt: prompting student to give information; Acc: accept; Sum: summary; Ev: evaluation. Scaffolding: Ques: questioning; Dial. link: dialogic link; Reass: reassurance

### Appendix 1: Rank scale units of discourse



(Wells 1996: 79)

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